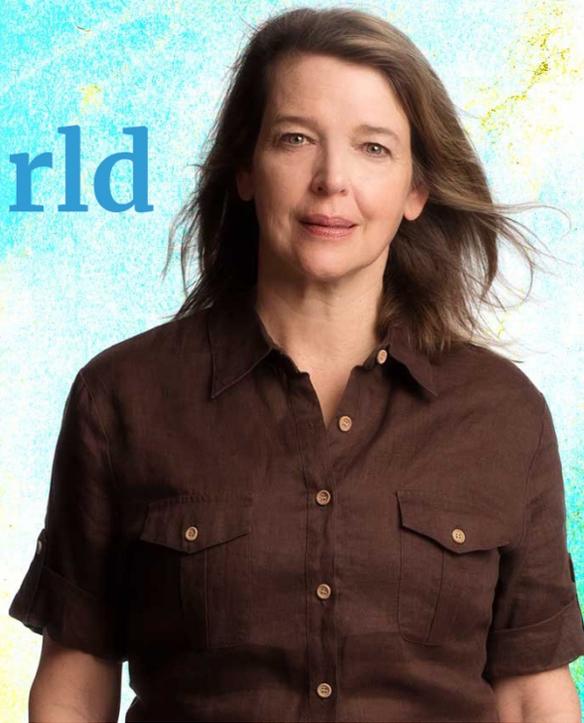


Alice and the World We Live In



Alice and the World We Live In **By Alexandria Haber**

Oct 15 – November 3, 2019

Centaur Theatre Study Guide

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SYNOPSIS:

Alexandria Haber’s play, *Alice and the World We Live In*, focuses on Alice, a woman who is struggling to overcome her grief and is dealing with trauma after the death of her husband. The play explores various important themes related to larger life topics, such as death and resilience, while also reflecting on the state of the world. Alice loses her husband when a bomb is detonated in the supermarket where she and her husband are buying groceries and arguing about mundane things. After an argument, she heads to their car while he waits to pay and the bomb goes off, killing him and others, but sparing her. This act of terrorism leads to Alice’s inability to see the world as a safe place and her wanting to recapture the past and somehow still have a life with her husband. Unable to cancel their anniversary travel plans, organized before her husband’s death, Alice goes on their hiking trip in Italy and finds herself faced with paralyzing fear when she has to cross a dangerous part of the mountain. Alice has to reflect on and engage with her past and the recent tragic event she has faced in order to find a way to move forward.

CHARACTERS:

Alice: A woman who has recently lost her husband in a bombing (in an act of terrorism).

Ever: A man (or figment of Alice's imagination) who appears to be Alice's deceased husband, and who later also appears to be a hiker, a stranger, who meets Alice while she is on her hike.

THEMES:

Love and relationships

Grief and loss

Terrorism (acts of terrorism)

Death

Trauma and fear

Regret

Appearance versus reality

Obstacles in life

Fate and choices

Trust

Resilience

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES:

1. The play alludes to Lewis Carroll's famous literary character and work *Alice in Wonderland*. Research Lewis Carroll and *Alice in Wonderland*. What facts about the author and his work relate to the way Alexandria Haber develops her play? What makes Haber's version different and/or special? How does knowledge of Lewis Carroll and *Alice in Wonderland* enhance one's understanding of Haber's play and her play's characters?
2. The play includes an act of terrorism (a bombing) that affects the main character in many ways. Research acts of terrorism (or terrorism) going on in the world today. Why is it important to reflect on the current state of the world within the context of Haber's play? How does terrorism figure as an important aspect in her play's development? Why does Haber choose to include an act of terrorism as the cause of Alice's husband's death? What does this contemporary issue and fear add to the complexity of Haber's play?

3. In the play, Ever says: “I think it’s as far to go back as it is to keep moving forward.” Alice replies: “It’s Shakespeare. ‘I am in blood. Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er.’” This quote is from Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*. Research Shakespeare and his famous play. What aspects of *Macbeth* apply to Haber’s play? What does Alice’s knowledge of this quote reveal about her and her current state of mind and place in life?
4. Research ways to overcome and deal with grief, anxiety, and/or paralyzing fears. What ways are applicable to Alice? What can help Alice heal and move forward?
5. Haber’s play can be read as an allegory. Research what an allegory is and try to explain why this play can be seen as an allegory. What does this play reveal beyond its literal sense?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND/OR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

1. The play is titled *Alice and the World We Live In*. What does the title evoke when first heard or read? How does the title relate to the themes developed in the play? How does the title indirectly reveal what transpires throughout the play?
2. Alexandria Haber is a well-known playwright and theatre artist/performer. Her play revolves around many significant life issues. At the start of her play’s script, below the title, she quotes a short dialogue from Lewis Carroll’s famous work: “Alice: How Long is forever? White Rabbit: Sometimes, just one second.” What does this dialogue reveal? What does the White Rabbit mean? Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
3. Haber also writes that her play is set in “early fall” and takes place “at a narrow path between two mountains.” Why do you think she chooses these setting aspects? What atmosphere is created as a result of her choices?
4. In the play, Ever is described as “being there all along but somehow camouflaged into the landscape. He stands behind Alice. She does not see him, but, with every word she says, he comes more and more into being.” Why do you think this is the case? What does Ever’s description reveal about him and about Alice?
5. The play starts with what is described as “a kaleidoscope of sounds that overlap and are running at a very fast speed,” such as a baby being born, an airplane taking off, news clips about bombings, and so on. Why does the play begin with these sounds? What effect is created? What is the significance of these sounds and the way they are heard and presented?
6. As the play progresses, some discrepancies are uncovered between what the characters are like on the outside (how they are perceived to be) and what they are

like on the inside (the reality of who they are and what they feel). Discuss both Alice and Ever in terms of what they project externally and who they are internally. What do those differences reveal about each character? How do those differences relate to the play's themes? For instance, what do they expose about the topic of appearance versus reality or public versus private self?

7. What does the choice of naming Alice "Alice" and her husband "Ever" symbolically reveal? How do the characters' names relate to the themes developed in the play?
8. Throughout the play, memories of the past are shown through repeated dialogues that surface again and again between the two characters. These repetitive parts almost intrude on the "real-time" dialogue of the play. Why are memories of the past revealed in this way? What effect is created in "being here and there" at almost the same time?
9. At one point in the play, Ever tells Alice: "The only way to get over your fear is by facing it." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
10. In the play, Alice states: "It's shitty in a way. Falling in love. The best part is at the beginning when you don't know how it ends." Do you agree or disagree with Alice? What is your definition or idea of falling in love?
11. Towards the end of the play, Alice says: "If we had just made one tiny different choice, we don't end up here. We have another life. You have another life." Ever replies: "There is no other life. There is the life you have and the life you don't have." Do you agree with Alice or with Ever? Why? Do you believe life is predominantly decided, as in fated, or is one's life purely the result of one's choices?
12. The play ends with Alice putting her glasses on, which allow her to see and which she had removed previously, and she "makes her way to the edge of the mountain [...] looks towards the distant view as fireworks continue to go off [...] [and] keeps walking."
 - a) What is your opinion on the ending of this play?
 - b) What is symbolically revealed in Alice's final gestures and actions?
 - c) How does the ending support the main themes of the play?
 - d) Would you have changed the conclusion of this play? How and why?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1. Students can be separated into groups, with each group assigned one of the two main characters in the play. The groups prepare a character analysis of their assigned character, listing all the physical, psychological, and sociological characteristics of the character. Students then discuss how the character development of their assigned character contributes to the larger themes of the play. Groups with the same character assigned can compare and/or contrast their findings.
2. Students can prepare a brief presentation on their family's history in terms of any significant or traumatic losses encountered. They can present the main characteristics of their family's situation and what impact this situation has had on them and on their family members. Alternatively, they can prepare a brief presentation on one of the other themes developed in the play by relating the theme of their choice to their own life experience and/or personal interests.
3. Students can present a moment in their life when they felt too many bad things were occurring at the same time or a moment when they had to make amends for something wrong that they had done. They can discuss how they dealt with and overcame these trials and tribulations and were able to move forward positively.
4. Students can be asked to analyze the play by relating one of its themes to current events, social issues within their community, or to their own personal experience. For example, Ever says: "You know it's only human beings that force themselves to relive painful emotions? Animals never do that." He brings up the issue of how people deal with grief and the theme of moving on. Students can analyze this theme and relate it to their own personal experiences.
5. Students can rewrite the ending of the play or add a scene reflecting what they think will happen to Alice in the near future.
6. Students can write a scene or song that reflects their thoughts and point of view on the issue of terrorism and the impact of terrorism on individuals and society. Students can perform or share their creation and explain the comment they are making through their creative endeavor.